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United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean were suspended in July 1996 owing to the lack of sufficient voluntary contributions to finance the operational and administrative costs of the Centre. Since then, the Centre had remained inoperational and activities involving the region were carried out through United Nations Headquarters. The General Assembly, in section III of its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997, requested the Secretary-General to fill the three posts of the Directors of the three regional centres for peace and disarmament, and encouraged the Directors of the centres to establish contact with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the regional organs, as well as with Member States of the different regions, with a view to finding resources for revitalization of the activities of the centres. On 1 December 1998, the Director of the Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean was appointed by the Secretary-General as a first step towards the revitalization of the Centre. On assuming his post, the Director undertook several missions within and outside the region with a view to securing funding and laying the groundwork for possible cooperation between the Regional Centre and Governments, regional entities, research institutes and non-governmental organizations.

A programme of work drawn up by the Director following consultations with Member States in the region contains activities dealing with regional and subregional security issues.

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These include the training of national police forces and border patrol officers in combating trafficking in firearms, ammunition and explosives, the organization of seminars on awareness-building for existing regional agreements and the training of regional peacekeepers in implementing disarmament mandates. As the first such activity, the Regional Centre assisted the Department for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat in organizing a workshop for the region, held at Lima, on 23 and 24 June 1999, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 53/77 T of 4 December 1998, by which the Secretary-General was requested to conduct broad-based consultations on illicit trafficking in small arms. Several other projects to be carried out in cooperation with regional organizations are being planned and are scheduled to be initiated in the second half of 1999 and the first half of 2000.

The past eight months since the reactivation of the Regional Centre have been a period of vigorous fund-raising by the Director. Despite the relative success achieved in this regard, the full functioning of the Centre is still hampered by the lack of sufficient resources for operational and administrative costs. It is hoped that, with the strong support of Member States, the viability of the Centre will be ensured in the forthcoming years.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/78 F of 4 December 1998, entitled "United Nations regional centres for peace and disarmament", in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide all necessary support, within existing resources, to the regional centres in carrying out their programmes of activities and to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The report covers the activities and the financial situation of the reactivated Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean during the period December 1998–July 1999.

II. Functioning and mandate

3. The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, located at Lima, was established in 1987, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 41/60 J of 3 December 1986. It functions under the auspices of the Department for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and is mandated to provide, upon request, substantive support for the initiatives and other activities of the Member States of the region for the implementation of measures for peace and disarmament and for the promotion of economic and social development. The Centre functioned until the end of June 1996, when its operations were suspended owning to insufficient voluntary contributions to finance its activities and administrative costs. Following the appointment of the new Director of the Centre by the Secretary-General, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997 and his assumption of office on 1 December 1998, vigorous efforts have been launched to raise funds with a view to revitalizing the activities of the Centre.

4. In pursuit of its mandate, the Centre renewed its aim at serving the countries in the region as: (a) a means of promoting subregional, regional and cross-regional activities; (b) a tool to identify synergies between security and development issues; and (c) an instrument for the United Nations in playing a proactive role in the establishment of a secure environment for social and economic development in the region.

III. Activities

5. During the period under review, the Centre initiated new contacts with potential partners within and outside the region, discussing possible cooperation with Governments and regional organizations, research institutes, academic institutions and individual experts, as well as United Nations regional bodies. Formal cooperation in and coordination of the Centre's work has also been initiated with other United Nations agencies and entities, as well as with the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa.

6. Various Governments in the region and regional organizations have formally and informally welcomed the involvement of the Centre in promoting the development of long-term solutions to national and transborder security problems. The Centre has also participated in regional and subregional meetings with a view to intensifying efforts to avoid overlapping of its activities with those of other institutions.

7. In response to an invitation by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Centre participated in a meeting of 23 regional United Nations bodies at Santiago, on 6 May 1999, to improve inter-agency coordination and promote collaborative action. The meeting also provided an opportunity for the Centre to explore areas of inter-agency cooperation. Discussions were initiated with ECLAC with the objective of developing a Latin American and Caribbean version of a future United Nations inter-agency database (to be known as UNITEData), which would enable regional United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and research institutes to learn more about each other's work.

8. The Centre has launched a project entitled "Regional clearing house on illicit trafficking in firearms, ammunition and explosives", which is an initiative intended to serve as a tool for nurturing national and regional expertise in the field of practical disarmament through workshops, fellowship and training programmes. The project promotes such initiatives as collective and national efforts to control the increasing illicit flow of firearms, ammunition and explosives in the region, and to foster the sharing of experience and lessons learned among regions. A similar project has been initiated in Africa by the Regional Centre at Lomé, which will host in early September 1999 the first joint meeting of the two regional centres to develop the "Institutions fighting illicit arms trafficking database" (IFITData).

9. Pursuant to the policy of cross-regional cooperation, the Director of the Centre participated in a meeting held at

Bamako, from 22 to 25 March 1999, which launched the programme for coordination and assistance for security and development, with a view to learning more about the efforts undertaken to implement the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons, declared by the Heads of Government of States members of the Economic Community of West African States (see A/53/763–S/1998/1194). This meeting provided an opportunity for the development of cross-regional actions and cross-fertilization between projects organized by the two regional centres at Lomé and Lima. It also established the grounds for the exchange of experience, where lessons learned in the process of preparing and adopting the Moratorium were shared with the Latin America and the Caribbean region.

10. The Centre participated in a subregional seminar on the proliferation of small arms, ammunition and explosives and its influence on regional stability, which took place at Buenos Aires, from 17 to 19 May 1999. The event, organized by the Government of Argentina, was attended by some 20 representatives from intelligence services, border patrol, customs, gendarmeries and national police forces of member States of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR), namely Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, and associated countries Chile and Bolivia, as well as officials of the United Nations.

11. The Buenos Aires seminar represented a first initiative undertaken in cooperation with the Department for Disarmament Affairs pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/77 T, in which the Secretary-General is requested to hold broad-based consultations on illicit trafficking in small arms, taking into account the ongoing work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Small Arms, with all Member States, interested regional and subregional organizations, international agencies and experts. Some of the recommendations and conclusions have called for cooperation between MERCOSUR member States and associated countries and the United Nations, as well as cooperation in the development of national databases and subregional capacity-building.

12. Pursuant also to the above-mentioned resolution, the Centre assisted the Department for Disarmament Affairs in organizing at Lima, from 23 to 25 June 1999, a workshop on the theme "Illicit trafficking in small arms: Latin American and Caribbean issues". The event provided an additional and more comprehensive opportunity to stimulate debate on the magnitude of the problem in the region and possible measures to combat illicit trafficking, and to identify the role of the United Nations in the region in that regard.

13. The workshop also provided a forum for regional experts to debate the role that the Centre could play as a United Nations entity. The view was expressed that there was a need to address the causes of illicit trafficking and the necessity to devise ways and means to curb the flow of arms into the region, in particular weapons for military use. It was further stressed that the United Nations had a specific role to play in the region by ensuring the constant flow of information on the issue. In that regard, the development of databases on specific areas of illicit trafficking was encouraged. Another role suggested for the United Nations was that of providing a platform for the law enforcement and other related communities to meet and discuss common problems of illicit trafficking. It was noted in this connection that the work of the United Nations should be carried out with a view to supporting the implementation of existing regional agreements and to assisting individual countries in preparing themselves to ratify and implement them.

14. The Centre was also represented at the sixteenth International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) Regional Conference for the Americas held at San Salvador from 26 to 28 May 1999. The objective of the Centre's attendance was twofold: (a) to learn more about the new INTERPOL strategic development plan; and (b) to identify areas of cooperation between INTERPOL and the Centre. In this connection, the Director of the Centre presented the current and planned activities of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and its Centre on illicit trafficking in small arms for the Latin America and the Caribbean region. Prospects of cooperation with the Centre were generally seen with respect to some aspects of the INTERPOL strategic development plan and the Centre's regional clearing house project. INTERPOL and the Centre have started discussions to develop a memorandum of understanding formally detailing specific cooperation activities between the two institutions.

15. The Centre was twice officially represented at meetings convened by the Organization of American States (OAS) during the reporting period. The first occasion occurred on 15 December 1998 when the newly appointed Director of the Centre accompanied the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs to make presentations to the Committee on Hemispheric Security, pursuant to requests made in OAS resolutions for support and the promotion of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and the United Nations standardized system for reporting military expenditures.

16. This meeting, and another invitation extended by OAS for the Director of the Centre to participate at a second workshop of the Committee on Hemispheric Security on

confidence and security-building measures in Washington, D.C., from 19 to 20 May 1999, laid the basis for cooperation between OAS and the Centre. Participants in both events welcomed the decision of the General Assembly to reactivate the Centre. Discussions at the Committee level led to a commitment to a first joint activity during the first quarter of 2000.

17. Agreement has also been reached with the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of OAS to organize a series of joint seminars during the second half of 1999. From the perspective of the Centre, the seminars will be organized within the framework of the regional clearing house project and should support activities aimed at assisting national institutions to better understand the different issues related to the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition and Explosives, and Other Related Materials (see A/53/78, annex) and Model Regulations for the Control of the International Movement of Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition, approved by OAS.

18. In addition, within the framework of General Assembly resolution 53/77 M of 4 December 1998, on consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures, the Centre has initiated consultations with a number of countries in the region on the possibility of undertaking activities concerning conflict prevention and practical disarmament measures.

IV. Finance and staffing

19. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 41/60 J, the Centre was established on the basis of existing resources and of voluntary contributions that Member States and interested organizations might make to that end. The task of the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Director of the Centre during the period under review has thus also been one of mobilizing the required resources for operating the Centre, as well as planning its future activities, identifying an appropriate new location and preparing for the various activities planned in the Centre's work programme.

20. The present situation of the trust fund has improved as a result of the fund-raising efforts. In the span of eight months, six countries have pledged to contribute financially or to provide human resources support to the activities and operations of the Centre. As at the end of July 1999, voluntary contributions in the amount of US$ 53,415 have been received. In addition, the Government of Japan has contributed US$ 50,000 in support of the Centre's activities related to practical disarmament measures. The Secretary-General wishes to express his gratitude to the Government of Peru, the host country, for its contribution to and overall support of the Centre. He would also like to thank the Governments of Colombia, Japan, Norway, Panama and Sweden for their generous support.

21. At present, the Centre operates with a Director and the administrative support of UNDP at Lima. Two staff members have been pledged by the Governments of Belgium and Sweden under the associate experts programme of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Countries in the region have also expressed interest in participating in the programme. Adequate funding for hiring local and other staff members from the region to provide administrative and operational support has, however, yet to be found.

22. The relative success of the past eight months of fund-raising does not provide for adequate financing for the full-functioning of the Centre. The Secretary-General, therefore, strongly supports and reiterates the appeal made by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/78 F to Member States in each region and to those that are able to do so, as well as to intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations and foundations, to make voluntary contributions to the Centre to enable it to strengthen and implement its programme of activities.

23. A report on the status of the trust fund for the Centre will be contained in an addendum to this report.

V. Conclusions and observations

24. The activities carried out during the period under review demonstrated the usefulness and timeliness of reactivating the operations of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Centre has already begun facilitating regional security debates, providing support to conflict prevention initiatives, as well as facilitating the sharing of experience on security matters. It has also contributed to the coordination of United Nations efforts towards peace and disarmament in the region with a view to making such efforts more dynamic and meaningful.

25. Within its mandate, the Centre is in a unique position to further the understanding of the relationship between security and development, to increase the role of the Organization in creating new impetus for the development of ideas linking security issues with social and economic development measures, and to be a regional catalyst for

activities by and with Member States, as a politically neutral platform for discussions on security and development issues.

26. The Secretary-General is of the view that the Centre at Lima has the potential to be a strong focal point for peace, disarmament and development issues for Governments, non-governmental organizations, industry and the diverse sectors of civil society in the region and for disarmament and development initiatives, such as weapons collection and conversion programmes. The Secretary-General looks to the support and cooperation of Member States for the Centre in the quest for regional peace and security in the twenty-first century.